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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000881

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL
USPACOM FOR FPA
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: KYAUKSE: THAN SHWE'S TIKRIT

REF: A. RANGOON 219

[1](#)B. RANGOON 5

[1](#)C. 03 RANGOON 1361

Classified By: COM Carmen M. Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A visit to Senior General Than Shwe's hometown of Kyaukse revealed a town of above average development, but with lingering religious tensions. After Buddhist-Muslim religious riots here in October 2003, there seems to have been little attempt by anyone to systematically eliminate the root causes. Neither, however, do the tensions seem to have affected people's daily life -- focused like most other Burmese lives on subsistence. End summary.

In Search of Peace and Development? Try Kyaukse.

[1](#)2. (U) Embassy Officers visited Senior General Than Shwe's hometown of Kyaukse in central Burma on June 28 and found tidy, leafy streets with neat houses radiating out from a small, yet bustling town center. The ten burned out Muslim-owned four-story buildings, in various stages of reconstruction, around the town's center square are a reminder of the religious riots that occurred here last October. Beside this, though, there were none of the usual signs of government neglect so evident in other towns and villages in Burma -- a fringe benefit of being a senior general's hometown (ref A). Kyaukse is located in Mandalay Division, an hour's drive south of Mandalay city along a well-engineered four-lane divided highway with concrete-reinforced bridges over most of the major creeks.

Kyaukse USDA Leaves Us at the Altar

[1](#)3. (C) The Secretary of the Kyaukse District Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), the GOB's mass member organization, evidently had obligations at the National Convention in Rangoon and was unavailable to meet with us. Instead, Poloff attempted to meet with township-level USDA officials. However, they never showed up at the district offices as promised, and finally the head of the USDA local office said that without the permission from a "higher authority the USDA cannot meet any foreign guest."

Legacy Remains of Religious Violence

[1](#)4. (C) Poloff visited the residence of a Muslim family to ask about the inter-communal riots in October 2003 (ref C) and was told the family was forced to flee for their lives when Buddhist mobs attacked Muslim shops and homes in the middle of the town. The arrival of intelligence agents ended our dialogue with the family, but they added that nine Muslims burned to death in their homes that day. Muslim leaders in Rangoon had previously given us accounts of the violence and the GOB's response (refs B and C).

[1](#)5. (C) To get the other side of the story, Poloff visited the Kyaukthinbaw monastery on Kyaukse hill, which currently houses 30 monks. Poloff met with monks who informed him that the Abbot of the monastery, Ven. Wisuda (73) and his young driver were killed by a Muslim mob from Letpan village, four miles away from Kyaukse, on their way to a Buddhist "robe offering ceremony" in his native village. Their bodies were dumped into Zawgyi Creek. This event re-ignited "dormant" tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities, and culminated with riots in Kyaukse on October 22.

[1](#)6. (C) Kyaukse's finest scoured Letpan for four days in search of the culprits responsible for the Abbot's murder. The monks informed Poloff that authorities told them 26 Muslims were arrested and put on trial at the Mandalay Divisional Court. Of these, 20 were sentenced to death, five were given long prison terms, and one minor was given seven years imprisonment. Though these numbers differ slightly from our previous understanding (ref B), local Muslim sources verified these monks' figures. (Note: though not mentioned in Kyaukse, the GOB also took stern legal and administrative measures against Buddhist monks in Rangoon for their part in subsequent religious violence in the capital.)

[1](#)7. (C) Notably, the monks stated their belief that tensions between the two religious groups was what sparked the

religious violence. Hence, they are eager to engage in inter-faith dialogue to mitigate the situation. This account contradicts statements by Rangoon Muslim leaders who were quick to blame GOB provocateurs, not latent religious tension, for the riots (ref B).

Comment: Not in His Backyard

18. (C) Though there has been no decisive resolution to last year's religious riots, tensions seem to have dissipated and they do not seem to have caused a change in the behavior of Kyaukse's ordinary citizens. The harsh punishments doled out by the regime in response to last October's events hammer home its conviction that there is no room in Burma for "instability," religiously inspired or not, especially in The Big Boss' hometown. End Comment.
Martinez